# Gay service members divided over policy

By Genevieve Anton
Gazette Telegraph

President Clinton's new policy on gays in the military has given hope to some homosexual service members but left others bitter.

Robin Lee, a lesbian who described herself as an active-duty Army reservist, called it a "step forward."

"He wants us to be judged on our performance, not on our sexual orientation," she said at a news conference in Colorado Springs. "As a homosexual, I feel less fearful of being in the military now."

But other gay service members, who are afraid to let their names be used, say Clinton reneged on his campaign promise to lift the ban on gays in the armed services.

"The president is selling short millions of gay people who voted for him thinking he would set a precedent in office," said one lesbian soldier at Fort Carson. "Now he's backing off because some people in the military can't accept the fact we're here and we're going to stay. That really stinks."

The "don't ask, don't tell" policy forbids the military from asking recruits about their sexual orientation or initiating investigations solely to determine someone's sexual orientation. But it also forces gays to keep their status secret and refrain from homosexual acts even in the privacy of their homes.

"We haven't gained a darn thing," said one gay captain at Peterson Air Force Base. "I still can't live my life the way I want to, without shame or fear."

The Colorado Human Rights Action Council said the policy forces military gays to live under unreasonable and oppressive restrictions. The group called it vague, predicting it would be open to interpretation and varying degrees of enforcement.

"It's going to be open hunting season on those who have come out and put their necks on the line thinking it would be safe soon," said a lesbian who recently left the Air Force to work for a defense contractor in Colorado Springs.

Other gays are more optimistic. As one gay master sergeant at the Air Force Space Command said: "My gay friends think it's a complete cop-out, but I believe anything is an improvement."

Gay troops are used to being discrete and keeping their private lives separate from work, he said, and probably would continue that even if the ban were lifted. "It won't be much of a change for us," he added.

Despite the limited nature of the new policy, some straight soldiers interviewed Monday outside the commissary at Fort Carson didn't like it.

"I don't condone it at all," said Pvt. 1st Class Wesley Davis, 22, who worries that gays will now flaunt their sexuality and push for more rights. "I think it's wrong, very wrong."

Some soldiers were confused about the policy and exactly how it would be enforced. Allowing gays to serve only if they remain celibate didn't make sense to 25-year-old Cpl. Jonathan Ericksen.

"It's going to be very expensive to train (gays) and then have to put them out," he said, "because I don't think they're going to be able to abstain from sex."

Spc. Brian Ristau, 20, said he doesn't think most gay service members will change their lifestyles or come out of the closet. To him, the new policy basically puts into writing an informal policy that already exists.

"I feel that President Clinton wasted a lot of time, energy and money in coming up with this," he said. As for change, the only thing he expects is more — not less — animosity toward gays.

"If people find out that a soldier is gay, there will be harassment, maybe even assaults," said Spc. Elisa Martinez, 25. As for the policy itself, she's like the rest. Skeptical.

"Personally, I don't think it's realistic," Martinez said. "It won't work."

---

Risa Berg contributed to this report.

93